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ABSTRACT

A study involving Special Education Administrators in each of Massachusetts' 24 school districts was conducted to evaluate the 1974-75 school year implementation of Chapter 766, a landmark special education reform law. Data was collected on school population, special education population, special education budget, CORE Evaluation referral statistics, and CORE Evaluation completion statistics. Among conclusions were the following: most school districts reported change in leadership as a function of administration; expenditures on the targets of change efforts appear not to affect the implementation of that change; and innovative and/or research based change implementation strategies are not generally practiced by most school districts. Findings indicated that variables and procedures which accounted for changes in practice in disciplines other than education, failed to account for such changes in practice within education. (SBH)

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CHAPTER 766: AN ANALYSIS OF YEAR ONE

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CHAPTER 766: AN ANALYSIS OF YEAR ONE

Orientation to the Problem

The Massachusetts legislature passed an exciting and comprehensive law in 1972, Chapter 766, viewed as landmark special education reform. The law, implemented in 1974, removes all category labels pertaining to the handicapped and replaces these with the blanket designation "special needs". The law additionally calls for a comprehensive evaluation process for any child suspected of being in "need" of special education services and is commited to the philosophy of integration of handicapped within the mainstream of education to the fullest extent possible. The law mandates parental participation in the development of educational programs for their child, and grants parents' rights in determining their child's educational future. All of these features represent a departure from traditional special education practice in Massachusetts, and indeed in most states.

Beyond the dramatic change mandated by Chapter 766 with regard to special education, the law has, inherent in its' implication, impact upon regular education programs as well. The law represents a new conceptualization regarding variance in learner styles, in that wider renges and varieties of learning abilities will now be represented in regular classrooms. Teachers are expected to demonstrate a new range of competencies under Chapter 766. They must be able to recognize learner needs, attempt to modify regular programs to meet those needs, and when this fails, refer the child for an

evaluation. Additionally, teachers are major participants in the evaluation process, providing information regarding the child's learning and behavioral strengths and weaknesses. Once the evaluation process has produced an educational plan, the teacher often then must actualize the plan in the classroom and provide periodic evaluations as to the appropriateness of the plan to the needs of the student.

The traditional school structure must make new adaptations to accommodate the requirements of Chapter 766. The law, in the theoretical sense presents a statement of significance regarding the availability of equal educational opportunity for all. In addition, the law implies that the most appropriate education is one based on diagnosed learner needs, and the development of learning strategies most appropriate to meet those needs. The legislation postulates that participation in the "mainstream" of educational activities is a desirable goal for all youngsters, even those with "special needs". In essence, Chapter 766 proposed that education must adapt and flex to meet learner needs, rather than learners adapting to meet the requirements of the educational system.

Chapter 766 was mandated for implementation in September, 1974, a mandate which required each school district in the commonwealth to practice the changes that the law represents. This mandate provides the researcher an opportunity to examine and evaluate the change implementation process on a cross-district basis, that is, through comparison of several school districts' implementation attempts.

Implementation of the Chapter 766 law over the course of one school year constituted the focal point of this study. An overarching purpose of the study was to document the degree to which a sample of local education agencies, comprising the Springfield (Mass.) region of the State Education Agency, implemented the new special education law. Further, the investigation aspired to identify factors which either facilitated or thwarted implementation endeavors.

The researcher believed common elements, variables or characteristics would surface from data gathered which would differentiate local education agencies in terms of their compliance to the law. He believed that patterns of data would be identified which related characteristics of LEAs to meaningful and to superficial compliance. It was hoped that generalizations pertaining to a mandated educational change, such as the Chapter 766 law, would be gleaned from the data gathered.

Research Methodology

An ex post facto design, based upon one group and two primary data sources, was used to expedite the study. Elements, variables, and characteristics selected for study were not manipulated by the researcher, as events surrounding them had already transpired. The researcher aspired to obtain information about the apparent diverse practices among LEAs in the implementation

of the law during the 1974-75 school year.

Once elements, variables, and characteristics pertaining to the implementation enterprise were listed and then categorized, the study focus could be determined. Nine hypotheses, based upon these analyses, were stated in the null format and tested. The hypotheses are:

1. There is no relationship between LEA enrollment and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.
2. There is no relationship between the percentage of special needs population of the LEA and the degree of implementation achieved.
3. There is no relationship between the amount of money invested in special education by the LEA and the degree of implementation achieved.
4. There is no relationship between the amount of change required to implement Chapter 766 and the degree of implementation achieved.
5. There is no relationship between prior involvement with educational change or innovation and the degree of implementation achieved.
6. There is no relationship between LEA leadership patterns and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.
7. There is no relationship between the effort invested to identify and utilize optimum methods to implement the Chapter 766 law and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.
8. There is no relationship between the acquisition of needs assessment information and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.
9. There is no relationship between the degree to which early adopters of educational change are utilized to influence laggards and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.

A chi square test was used to ascertain the significance of the relationships.

The Data

A survey research modus operandi was employed which was based upon two kinds of data: first, data drawn from reports prepared by educational specialists of the Massachusetts State Department of Education; and second, data drawn from pre-tested questionnaires completed by special education coordinators situated in the LEAs.

Special Education specialists within the Springfield Regional Office of the SEA developed a format that was used to evaluate progress within each of the school districts in June, 1975. The format was a source of information which was crucial to the conceptualization of the present study, because it provided the following demographic data: school population; special education population; special education budget information; CORE Evaluation referral statistics; and CORE Evaluation completion statistics. From these raw data the following information could be determined for each district: (1) the percentage of the total school population the special education population represents, (2) the percentage of CORE Evaluations completed during the 1974-75 school year, and (3) the average per-pupil expenditure on special education in each district. Such information seemed important inrelation to an evaluation of the 1974-75 school year implementation of Chapter 766.

A survey instrument was designed to provide information relative to the change process involved with the implementation of Chapter 766 as part two of the data acquisition process. The survey instrument was designed to

be administered to the Special Education (SPED) Administrators of each of the twenty-four (24) school districts in the research sample. They were asked to respond to eleven questions each contributing to an understanding of the change process surrounding Chapter 766's implementation in their district.

Questions 1-4 were directed toward measuring the degree of change Chapter 766 represented to the school district. In question one, each of the seven required "766 program prototypes" are listed and the respondents were asked to indicate which each had available prior to September, 1974 in their school district. Parental participation in special education programs prior to Chapter 766 is surveyed as part of question two.

The four essential components of a CORE Evaluation, required under Chapter 766, were listed as part of question three, and those responding were to indicate which of these were "routine" procedures in their school district prior to Chapter 766's mandate. The fourth question sought an indication of the effect of "mainstreaming" on prior practice in the school district. "Mainstreaming" involves the integration of "special needs" pupils in regular education program whenever possible. The philosophy of mainstreaming, inherent in Chapter 766, alters the traditional approaches of "special classes" and separate programs for special education pupils. Each SPED Administrator indicated in this question the extent of change "main-

streaming" represented to their school district's special education programing.

Prior involvement with educational change in each school district was the focus of questions five and six. The former asked respondents to list educational practices changed over the past three years in the school district, and the latter asked the respondents to indicate the sources of leadership for each of the changes mentioned.

Question "7" listed a varicty of educational personnel and an open-ended "other", and asked that each of their personnel be rated as to their leadership role in the school district regarding the implementation of Chapter 766 during the 1974-75 school year. Agency resource potential and sophistication were focal points of questions eight and nine. These questions elicited information about options for change available to school district personnel as well as how they went about implementing methods chosen. Question nine included three subheadings asking for information as to the "initial targets" of education change strategies, the degree to which these initially target recipients of change strategies were used in subsequent change efforts, and who the "secondary" targets of the change effort were.

Sources of leadership in the actual implementation of the change strategies identified in question "9" were sought in conjunction with question ten, and, the eleventh question highlighted the area of "needs assessment", that is, an open ended question surrounding the sources, methods, and uses of

needs assessment information regarding Chapter 766 needs in the school district was used.

The survey instrument was developed and pre-tested during 1975. A revised instrument was administered to the SPED Administrators of the Springfield Education Region at a regular SPED Administrators meeting, January 22, 1976. Eighteen of the twenty-four SPED Administrators who comprise the region were present at the meeting and were given the survey material and directions at that time. The researcher remained at the meeting while the Administrators completed the survey to answer any questions that arose. Administration of the survey instrument from introduction to completion of the last questionnaire took 42 minutes.

Subsequently, a copy of the survey instrument was mailed to each of the six SPED Administrators who were absent at the meeting when the survey was administered. A letter of explanation accompanied the mailing. Three of the SPED Administrators responded to the mailed request by returning the completed survey. In summary, twenty-one of the twenty-four school districts in the sample submitted completed survey instruments to the researcher.

Data obtained were converted to a point system which permitted comparisons across LEAs and tests of the significance of each of the nine hypothesis.

The Sample

All twenty-four LEAs which comprise the Springfield (Mass.) education region of the SEA were studied. All of these LEAs are serviced by, and submit reports to the same state officials in the Springfield Regional Office.

Data Analysis

Data obtained were compiled and then presented by each participating LEA and across all participating LEAs. Information gleaned from the SEA report forms provided a foundation which included LEA total population, special needs population, CORE Evaluation completions, and per-pupil expenditures for special education - upon which subsequent analyses were expedited.

The total school district population of each district was divided by the total reported "special needs" population to produce a percentage of special needs pupils in each school district. This percentage figure enabled the researcher to compare school districts with regard to their percentage of "special needs" pupils.

Information from the State Department Monitoring reports regarding CORE Evaluations was used to determine the degree of implementation achieved by the school districts. In the reports, the number of students referred for CORE Evaluations was recorded, and this figure was divided by the number of completed CORE Evaluations, which resulted in the percentage of completed

766 evaluations for each school district. The percentage of completed CORE Evaluations was obtained because it is the figure which indicated the degree of implementation achieved by each school district. In order to complete CORE Evaluations, each district had to have, in practice, the necessary elements of the CORE Evaluation required under the law. Further, the completion of the CORE process represented the implementation of the appropriate program which provided a measure of the percentage of children being served. This factor, the percentage of completed CORE Evaluations was used as an indication of the degree of implementation achieved. Unfortunately, it does not measure the quality of the implementation. Quality was outside the scope of this study.

The percentage of completed CORE Evaluations computed for each district forms the basis for categorizing the districts for purposes of this research. To test the hypotheses presented in this study, it was necessary to isolate those school districts "most fully implemented" and those school districts "least fully implemented" in order to test the stated hypotheses.

The final item of information gleaned from the State Department Reports involved per-pupil expenditure for special education. On the State Reports, school districts recorded their total budget expenditures for Chapter 766 (all special education services) during the school year, 1974-75. This amount was then divided by the total number of students identified as having "special needs", the result being an "average per-pupil expenditure" for special education. The figure represents an "average", as it includes those pupils in costly individual out-of-district placements as well as those minimally serviced by tutors or itinerant personnel. The per-pupil expenditures were categorized for purposes of this research into "high", "medium", and

"low" per-pupil expenditures.

The instrument administered by the researcher yeilded information about LEA capacity for change, previous involvement in change endeavors, and procedures employed by LEAs to effect change. The first four items on the instrument focused upon information pertaining to a school district's readiness for implementation of the Chapter 766 law. The researcher devised a tabulation procedure which permitted a comparison of readiness across the LEA units. Similarly, tabulation procedures were devised to translate responses obtained into numerical form for the remainder of items on the survey instrument. The result of these translations was a set of data capable of being subjected to systematic demographic and statistical analysis.

Data were presented as follows: first, demographic data summarizing conditions within each LEA were reported; second, demographic data summarizing conditions across districts were reported; and third, the results of chi square analyses of the "most fully implemented" LEAs and the "least fully implemented" LEAs were reported. These data were used to test the hypotheses previously stated.

Results and Conclusions

Several paradoxes were noted as a consequence of this study. LEAs exerted considerable effort during the year being studied to comply with the law, and all achieved a level of implementation which suggested a commitment to the intent of the legislation. However, this outcome could not be related to SEA or LEA strategies employed to implement the law or to characteristics

of LEAs isolated. None of the nine hypotheses tested were rejected (see table I). Among conclusions reported are the following:

1. Most school districts reported change leadership as a function of administration.

2. Expenditures on the targets of change efforts appear not to affect the implementation of that change.

3. Innovative and/or research based change implementation strategies are not generally practiced by school districts.

4. Needs assessment information is generally not collected in a well defined systematic manner in most school districts.

5. Those LEAs having the greatest distance to move to implement the law, generally ranked among the "more fully implemented" school districts.

6. Prior involvement with charge undertakings was unrelated to LEA compliance with the law.

Table I: Outcomes of Tests of the Null Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Needed to reject at .05 level	Chi square value obtained
There is no relationship between LEA enrollment and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.	9.488	.90000
There is no relationship between the percentage of special needs population of the LEA and the degree of implementation achieved.	9.488	3.46939
There is no relationship between the amount of money invested in special education by the LEA and the degree of implementation achieved.	9.488	3.08571

There is no relationship between the amount of change required to implement Chapter 766 and the degree of implementation achieved.	9.488	7.2000
There is no relationship between prior involvement with educational change or innovation and the degree of implementation achieved.	9.488	6.81333
There is no relationship between IEA leadership patterns and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.	9.488	5.92667
There is no relationship between the effort invested to identify and utilize optimum methods to implement the Chapter 766 law and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.	N/A	N/A
There is no relationship between the acquisition of needs assessment information and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.	N/A	N/A
There is no relationship between the degree to which early adopters of educational change are utilized to influence laggards and the degree of implementation of Chapter 766 achieved.	5.991	1.07019

The degree of implementation achieved by all of the districts represents a commitment to the philosophy and mandate of Chapter 766. Implementation of the law is a complex matter. It represented new conceptual thinking with regard to special education, and involved the total professional staff of each school system. Such total change is difficult, and, for each district to have

achieved the levels of implementation recorded in this study, is a testament to intention and effort, when one considers the lack of sophistication in change implementation the data highlighted.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment of the study relates to the lack of significance reported. Either the variables isolated for study were not accounting for the divergence described, or, the study modus operandi failed to detect effects of the selected variables. One thing seemed clear: variables and procedures which accounted for changes in practice in disciplines other than education, failed to account for such changes in practice within the discipline of education.